

## VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *KAMALA*: JIBE AT VALUE SYSTEM OF YELLOW JOURNALISM

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### ABSTRACT

*Literature describes fiction, imagination and reality and expounds these things with a critical approach. The play of Vijay Tendulkar shows the socio-political realities of his time. Playwright Tendulkar was a journalist too. He was sub-editor in dailies like Loksatta, Navbharat and Maratha. The play Kamala was written in 1981 in which Tendulkar criticised "Yellow Journalism" which is also called sensational journalism in order to establish the ethics of sensible journalism. The present paper is about a modern success-oriented journalist- Jaisingh Jadhav, who was a steadfast follower of sensational journalism. He purchased an adivasi girl Kamala for 250 rupees from rural flesh market in an auction and used her as an object by presenting her at a press conference in order to get publicity and promotion in his job. Jaisingh was seeking to capitalize on women trafficking. He was dismissed because some very big people were involved in that flesh market and they made pressure on Jaisingh's proprietor. It exposed how poor and illiterate girls are being sold in auctions and how some bigwigs of the city are also involved in these flesh markets.*

**KEYWORDS:** Dehydrated society, Purchase, Slavery, Sensationalism, Promotion, Yellow journalism

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### INTRODUCTION

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) was a leading Indian playwright, translator, essayist, journalist and theatre director. He came to the limelight with the publication of his play *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* in 1967. Tendulkar was crowned Padma Bhushan in 1984. He won Maharashtra state government award in 1969. He received Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1970. He was awarded National Film Award for Best screenplay for the movie *Manthan* (1976). He guided students studying "play-writing" in several U.S. universities. Tendulkar is said to be the pioneer who changed the framework of Marathi theatre by his prismatic quality of creativity.

This paper tries to throw light on that sensibility of journalists is now moving towards sensationalism. Jaisingh a young journalist used two women in this play as mere objects. Kamala was bought and used by Jaisingh just to get a promotion by presenting this exposure as sensational news. The second woman used by Jaisingh is his own wife Sarita, a housewife, who is not even allowed to take decisions herself in her so-called own house. Vijay Tendulkar being a journalist was very well aware of issues in journalism. His play *Kamala* is said to be borrowed from a real life expose by the journalist Ashwini Sarin of The Indian Express, who actually bought a girl from the rural flesh market in Madhya Pradesh to prove the trafficking of women. Vijay Tendulkar who himself was a journalist, exposed deftly the status of women in Indian society and the rat-race competition of modern young journalists to get promotion in jobs and publicity in professional life.

The entire play is divided into two acts. The first act shows modern sensational journalism where Jaisingh a journalist used a poor girl Kamala as an object and the second act explores the institution of marriage in the

patriarchal society where husband Jaisingh became head of his wife Sarita.

The play *Kamala* started thus - A 60 years old gentleman Kakasaheb was speaking on the phone in the drawing room of Jaisingh Jadhav, a well-known young journalist in Delhi. Though Kakasaheb was born in an aristocratic family but he has lived a simple life as he was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Sarita, wife of Jaisingh came with breakfast for his uncle Kakasaheb. Kakasaheb was happy to hear that finally, he was going to meet his son-in-law, Jaisingh Jadhav as it was impossible for him to meet him because Jaisingh was too busy, but Kakasaheb was unhappy too with Jaisingh Jadhav's way of journalism. He remarked; "Who's got the time to get first-hand knowledge? If you hesitate, you're lost. High-Speed journalism! Let's see who runs fastest - if it comes to that, write any old nonsense." (Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 06). Kakasaheb was unhappy with the way of Jaisingh Jadhav's gathering eyewitness evidence of murder, bloodshed, rape, violence etc. According to Kakasaheb, there was no need for this type of journalism. He wanted Jaisingh Jadhav to discuss and comment on that topic and suggest a way to stop such occurrences. Kakasaheb added that Jaisingh Jadhav's journalism was wasting the country's time, it was not journalism but a business. Jaisingh entered with a village woman, Kamala. She was wearing a dirty white saree and her face was hidden. Jaisingh became happy to see his father-in-law and requested Kakasaheb to stay at his house at least for a week. On his request Kakasaheb replied in a satirical way; "Okay, leave me here - and go to Kerala or else to Nepal and conduct your - your murder investigation." (08). This satire was on modern success-oriented generation journalists having no time and they were ready to sacrifice every relation for the sake of their professional life.

Kakasaheb asked him about that village girl, first, he ignored Kakasaheb but when Sarita again asked him he replied to her unwillingly that he bought this girl from Luhardaga Bazaar in Bihar for 250 rupees. When Sarita asked that why did he purchase her he remarked; "I could smell something wrong. The police, as usual, washed their hands of it. The Home Minister put his hands over his ears. They made the false charge that newspapermen tell lies. So it fell on me to put the noose around the right neck-- with evidence." (15). Jaisingh Jadhav purchased Kamala from the flesh market and was going to hand over her at a Press Conference. That poor girl could bring him a promotion in his job and also popularity in the market of sensational journalism. He told her that this plan would create high drama at the press conference. It showed how much he was excited as this uproarious news would create a sensation. According to P.D. Dubee- "He duped Kamala who had come prepared to his bonded keep with all the associated feelings of sex, motherhood and living." (Dubee, *The Theme of Flesh Trade in Vijay Tendulkar's Kamala*, 44).

Suddenly Jaisingh's colleague Jain, a thirty-five man came but servant Kamalabai's interrogation made him suspicious about Jaisingh's trip and he asked Jaisingh to tell him the truth. According to Mahatma Gandhi; "The sole aim of journalism should be service." (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 253). It is 'Yellow Journalism' which is different from Mahatma Gandhi's concept of journalism i.e. the service of the people of the nation. Modern journalists do not focus on sensible journalism, rather they misguide people through sensational journalism. Journalism nowadays is all about gaining personal profits through enhancing more and more readers. We came to know that Jaisingh was always busy travelling for seeking sensational news. Telephonic threats were normal for him now. His only purpose was to earn money by creating sensational news. When Jain went to the guest room, Jaisingh warned Sarita not to ask Jain to stay for lunch. Jaisingh wanted to let him go as soon as possible. Now Jaisingh went to Kamala and told her that there would be a grand reception and she had to come over there. Kamala was hesitating and told Jaisingh that she was not going to come at any cost. Now Jaisingh was in dilemma and asked Kamala; "Kamala, you won't obey me?" (Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 20). He further added; "I order you to come there with me. Today." (20). Jaisingh told her that people will ask her some questions and she

would have to answer questions. Kakasaheb was silently watching all this, then came Sarita and asked Jaisingh to give Kamala one of her sarees as Kamala's sari is torn. Jaisingh became furious to hear this and shouted at Sarita not to give her saree as he had nothing to do with either her saree torn or not. All he wanted was to present that poor village girl at the press conference as she was. The helplessness of both Sarita and Kamala depicted the miserable status of women in our patriarchal society.

Kakasaheb, who was watching all this asked Jaisingh about how his blood thirsty professional plot was going on. Kakasaheb was satirising his way of sensational journalism and addressed it as fresh 'masala-news'. When Jaisingh narrated Kakasaheb that what he is doing is not mercenary journalism, Kakasaheb replied; "... five years ago you were living in the shed outside a house in Karol Bagh. And today you are in a bungalow in Neeti Bagh. Even if it is a small one, you have servants, you have a car. You travel by plane all over the country. You stay in five-star hotels." (23). This verbal conflict between Kakasaheb and Jaisingh told us what type of journalism is followed by modern journalists. They earn a lot from creating sensational news. Thus they spent luxurious life. They had contact with ministers, chief ministers, and aristocrats. They didn't have principles and moral values. They did not attack on uncontrolled machinery of power but will make sure to attack weak and backward people of society. Journalists like Jaisingh were doing all this for fortunate people. Jaisingh was one of them who knows that it's a crime to sell or buy people but he is not afraid of it. He bought Kamala, an adivasi girl for 250 bucks and now was using her as a tool. He made sure if he was going to jail for this crime then his editor will fight the case in Supreme Court. Jaisingh was not anxious for Kamala, whom he was using to gain publicity. He informed Sarita that he was going to send Kamala to a women's home; an orphanage, after presenting her at the press conference. Where she would have two square meals a day and a roof over his head. It exposed how insensitive Jaisingh was, he treated Kamala as if she is an animal and not human.

It was night. Jain and Jaisingh have had a drink. Jaisingh was happy as he became successful in his plan. Jain narrated to Sarita that Jaisingh showed Tamasha at the Press Club; "Sensational Journalism. You're all right, but from tomorrow our editor's going to twist all over tales. Look what Jaisingh brought! You have to bring something more sensational, more explosive." (27). Jain told Sarita and Kakasaheb how photographers were going crazy so that they can get a photo of Kamala. He compared poor Kamala with heroine Shabana and Smita, and said that Kamala alone knocked both of them out today. He also mocked some journalists, who even don't know that what questions should be asked to an adivasi girl like Kamala. They were asking her about social problems in her area. Kamala was being asked for terms related to economy such as 'above the poverty line' or 'below the poverty line', which she might not be aware of. How an adivasi girl like Kamala could be able to reply to such questions. Vijay Tendulkar's plays deftly deal with power, atrocity, politics, oppression, bloodshed, sex and violence. He remarked; " I am against sensational journalism". (The Sunday Observer). This press conference exposed the value system of modern journalism. Journalists at Press Conference asked Kamala's views about the exploitation of the tribals, free sex, illegitimate children etc., these questions showed how selfish, cruel and insensitive they were. None of them asked her serious questions. They were having some fun at the poor woman's expense by asking her terrible questions. They were laughing at her. Jaisingh also made fun of that adivasi girl by saying that these people from jungle are tough as they got natural endurance. When Kakasaheb interrupted him by saying that he had sold a poor and illiterate woman, he lost his control and asks Kakasaheb to apologize but soon Jaisingh realized his mistakes and went to his room.

The crux of the play is situated in the conversation between Sarita and Kamala. Sarita was sitting alone Kamala

came and asked her innocently what price Jaisingh had pay for Sarita; "How much did he buy you for?" (Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 34). This very question shook Sarita's conscience. Now she realised her real position that Jaisingh was using both, Kamala and Sarita. She realised that she was also a tool for Jaisingh like Kamala was. She was not allowed to decide how to manage home affairs. She was a Slave woman in family system. The innocent question of Kamala made Sarita aware of her position within marriage. The phone rang to congratulate Jaisingh on this sensational press conference. A huge number of people were calling Jaisingh to congratulate him. The phone rang again, Kakasaheb took the phone, this phone call was from Police Station. Inspector Madhosingh enquired for Jaisingh and told that he had some urgent business with Jaisingh. Jaisingh understood the situation and decided to take Kamala to an orphanage at once. Sarita told that Jaisingh is deceiving Kamala and tried to stop him. At this, he shouted at Sarita that it was only he who could take decisions in that house. He added that he could not keep Kamala at home, if he did so he would lose the case for buying Kamala. He would be sent to prison, so it was necessary that Kamala should stay in women's home. Sarita and Kakasaheb looked at each other and Kakasaheb asked Sarita; "You know the reasons he gave were completely Shallow ones. You see, Kamala is just a pawn in his game of chess." On which Sarita replied; "Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb. Me too... me too." (43). Sarita observed how Jaisingh used both Kamala and Sarita as stepping stones for his success. He purchased Kamala from a rural flesh market for 250 bucks so that he could present this adivasi girl at a press conference rather than make a protest against the trafficking of women. The pressmen asked her vulgar questions. Jaisingh did all this for the sake of his promotion and publicity and did not think about what would happen to Kamala after this exposure. He used this poor and illiterate girl as an object. After presenting her at the press conference he throws her in a women's orphanage. Same is the case with Sarita. Sarita, who was Jaisingh's wife did not have the right to make decisions. He treated her as a puppet. She had to manage her home affairs but it is Jaisingh who decided the rules and regulations. Sarita's value was not more than a slave. She told Kakasaheb that she is planning to expose Jaisingh Jadhav at a Press Conference at the Press Club; "I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav." (46) She added; "...listen to the story of how he bought the slave Kamala and made use of her. The others live he got free - not just free - the slave's father shelled out the money - a big sum. Ask him what he did with it." (46). Sarita wanted to hold a Press Conference so that she could expose her husband Jaisingh Jadhav. She wanted to let them know how a famous journalist, who advocates freedom, behaves like a tyrant in his own house. His wife had no right to make decisions. She had to do what is told by her husband and that she was dominated by him. Kamala's question made her realise that she was also an object for his husband Jaisingh who exploits both Kamala as well as his own wife, Sarita. Sarita remarked; "They (Women) must only slave away. Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says laugh. Cry, when he says cry. When he says pick up the phone, they must pick it up. When he says come to a party, they must go." (46). She was going through inner conflict. She observed that she was asleep and Kamala woke her up. Because of Kamala, she could see things more clearly. She felt that it was not her home as she had no authority and was being treated like a slave. When Kakasaheb tried to calm her down by saying that Jaisingh has made a name for himself in journalism and whatever he got, he earned that himself. She narrated; "...But why? If a man becomes great, why doesn't he stay a great man? Why does he become a master?" (47).

Sarita who was a symbol of sacrifice was not ready to limp behind his master now. Suddenly the doorbell rang, Sarita opened the gate and Jain came inside. He was tensed and told Sarita that Jaisingh's boss had dismissed him from his job. Some very big people were involved in the flesh market, from where Jaisingh bought that adivasi girl. They made pressure on the proprietor so he decided to dismiss Jaisingh, though the proprietor himself became famous because of Jaisingh's hard work. Kakasaheb could not understand this injustice to Jaisingh as he worked hard to make his proprietor's

paper famous and here Jain played a vital role in exposing this sensational journalism. "By introducing Jadhav's colleague into the play, Tendulkar is able to depict the true nature of rat race that goes on in this milieu." (Banerjee, "Introduction", *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, XVII). Jain explained Kakasaheb; "A big paper doesn't recognise respect and all that Kakasaheb - it only knows about circulation and advertisements. And profit and loss," (Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 48).

Finally, Jaisingh Jadhav who used that adivasi girl as an object to get publicity became a victim and was discarded from his job by his proprietor despite doing cogent work for that newspaper. Jaisingh who crossed the path of the wrong people, was persecuted from his job. As Jaisingh Jadhav did not hesitate to use people as an object to get promotion in his job, so was his proprietor. He also dismissed Jaisingh when there had been pressure on him by big people. In an interview Vijay Tendulkar said; "My work has come from within me as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead but I can't do it, I have to speak the truth". This play is a dissection of modern journalism through the two characters - a famous journalist Jaisingh Jadhav and his Proprietor. The question was raised on modern journalism through the journalist like Jaisingh Jadhav, who sacrificed human values to make his journalism sensational. On the other hand, true journalism was presented through the character of Kakasaheb, who ran a small paper but he is not ready to give up moral values for this rat race of sensational news. According to Margaret Atwood; "sensational journalists like to believe the worst; that can sell more papers that way, ... for even upstanding and respectable people really love to read ill of others." (Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 43).

Jaisingh could not handle this and he growled; "... what does he imagine himself to be? What is he? A bloody capitalist. A swindler. A black marketeer. A bloody income-tax evader. A criminal. I'll hold a Press Conference tomorrow - I'll strip the cover off him! I'll expose all his dirty secrets." (Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 50-51). At the end of the play, Jain was the only friend who is still with him in his hardships. It was Jain, to whom Jaisingh kept everything secret including planning to purchase Kamala. Though Jaisingh Jadhav was a brilliant journalist but was a tyrant and used two women as stepping stones; one is Kamala, who used to get publicity and another woman is his own wife Sarita, for social and domestic comfort. Though she surrendered to her husband's immediate crisis as he was discarded from his job by his owner but she was firm about her decision; "... but a day will come Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish and no one will rule over me. That day has to come." (52).

This paper attempted to track the backward tendency of sensational journalism. The dialogue between Sarita and Kamala was exposing the psychological torture of women in today's society. Trafficking of women is an outcome of social and economic disparity but it is strange that the intent of a journalist like Jaisingh behind purchasing Kamala was to present her as a proof of flesh trade for his name and fame sake and on this too they made a joke of those innocent people insensitively. Modern journalism has become a device of degrading human values and sensationalism and the demise of a journalist like Jaisingh suggested that erratic behaviour in journalism could not be tolerated.

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